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DEPT FOR AF/E AND DRL/IRF  
LONDON AND PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2019  
TAGS: KIRF PHUM PGOV ER  
SUBJECT: GSE CONFISCATES CATHOLIC BUILDING MATERIALS

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K. McMullen for reason 1.4(d).

¶11. (C) Over the last two weeks the Eritrean government (GSE) has confiscated truckloads of building materials used for various outreach projects from the San Francesco Catholic Church in Asmara. The building materials were purchased legally two years ago, according to one of the priests, some even from the GSE-owned Red Sea Corporation. The priest admitted that initially after the purchase, the church sold some metal sheets without "permission." The GSE fined the church and arrested the person in charge of the sale; however, "this was over two years ago" noted the priest. Now, the GSE has returned to confiscate the materials, which include lumber, roof tiles, metal sheets, and other commodities hard to come by in Eritrea. The priest stated the GSE provided no letter and no warning.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: The GSE has a history of targeting the Catholic church, despite it being one of the four approved religious groups, due to the church's often outspoken nature.

The priest who met with the emboffs spoke candidly about the confiscation of the church's building materials, something unusual in a country where the reality of GSE abuse is often swept under the rug. Post believes the GSE will continue to single out the Catholic church as long as it remains independent of GSE control and continues to speak out against efforts by the Isaias regime to hamper and undermine its religious and social activities.

McMULLEN